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NEW JERSEY COLLEGES:



Airview showing part of "St. E's" 440-acre campus with Holy Family Chapel (left) and Xavier Hall flanking Administration Building. In background are St. Joseph Hall, an L-shaped activities building, and dormitories.

The 'White Towers of Convent'

By JOHN T. CUNNINGHAM

BISHOP JOHN J. O'CONNOR, the principal orator of the day, got quickly to the heart of a very important matter as he addressed the graduates of the College of St. Elizabeth on June 18, 1903. "Why," he asked pointedly, "should women receive higher education if they are not to enter public life?"

The Misses Blanche Maskell, Harriet Seton McCabe, Mary Ennis and Esther Kenna of the Class of 1903 scarcely breathed. Possibly they had asked themselves the same question many times. Quite probably their parents had wondered. Certainly prominent educators had asked the question for decades, and most had concluded that mere woman didn't need much of an education to be a wife and mother.

But, as four young women prepared

to receive the first college degrees ever granted women by a New Jersey institution, they heard the bishop strike a high note in their favor—and in favor of women's education for evermore.

"No degree of mental or moral training can be too great for those upon whom the welfare of the home chiefly depends," said Bishop O'Connor. "The standard of utility is not the true criterion by which to test the worth of education, whether in men or in women. Rather, the best education obtainable is, for its own sake, of priceless value."

The sentiments of the bishop expressed well the lasting philosophy of the College of St. Elizabeth, the first college for women in New Jersey and one of America's first Catholic wom-

An Imposing Morris County Landmark for Decades, the College of St. Elizabeth Also Has Served to Guide Progress of Higher Education for Women in Jersey

en's colleges. Since those first four young pioneer students received their degrees nearly 4,000 young women have been educated at "St. E's" (as students and graduates call their alma mater).

SET on a high ridge of the Jersey highlands in Morris County, St. Elizabeth's has been an imposing landmark for decades. The "white towers of Convent" are clearly visible for many miles to south and southwest of the campus. Those towers, and the 440-acre campus surrounding them, are a memorial to Mother Mary Xavier Mehegan—a truly remarkable personality of her church, of the educational world and of New Jersey.

Obviously the College of St. Elizabeth has grown and changed since the

days of Mother Xavier. Any spirit bold enough and determined enough to found a woman's college in 1899 would welcome both growth and sound change. Welcome it? Nay, expound it. The founder would like St. E's in 1955.

Mother Xavier's college has become a respected small liberal arts college, where some 475 young women are educated for a variety of careers—in teaching, in medicine, in social work, in home economics and many other spheres of American life, including careers as wives and mothers.

To thousands of Lackawanna Railroad riders St. Elizabeth's is the expansive white central administration building flanked by the splendid Gothic chapel of white brick to the west and Xavier Hall to the east.

This is the fifth of a series of articles which not only describe New Jersey's colleges and universities, but tell the story of the growth and traditions of individual colleges within the state, picture their roles in modern education and explain how they plan to meet what has been called "an impending tide of students."

Next Sunday: Westminster Choir College.



Biology class conducting an experiment in laboratory at St. Elizabeth's which has always been noted for the quality of her teaching in the sciences. RIGHT: Students on their way to classes in St. Joseph Hall pass college seal set in floor near main entrance.



BELOW: Convent Station at 8:08 a.m., on a typical morning as commuting students or "day hops" leave the Lackawanna train to which much of the college's morning schedule is attuned. RIGHT: Santa Rita Hall, one of the early dormitories, houses resident students.



These are the "white towers of Convent," readily seen from the railroad and highway, yet they are merely an introduction to the College of St. Elizabeth. Back on the hills behind the towers is the rest of the college.

THERE, beneath towering oak and elm trees, are Santa Rita and O'Connor halls, four-story white brick dormitories capable between them of housing 345 students. Close by is Santa Maria Hall, the major classroom building and the library. Here, too, are two small frame science buildings, the Greek Theater, the greenhouses and the noted Shakespeare Garden.

Above all, in the midst of the forest on the slope down from Santa Maria, is Saint Joseph Hall, the \$1,500,000 activities building completed in May

1954. It includes within its modern brick walls a pastel-tinted gymnasium, a swimming pool brightened by colored lights and a spacious lounge complete with a wide expanse of picture windows and a massive fireplace. Elsewhere in "St. Joe's" are classrooms, the college store, offices and other addenda. Those who acclaim this new hall as one of the finest new small college buildings in the country are right.

In the midst of all this \$1,500,000 splendor there is a quiet reminder of Mother Xavier and the Sisters of Charity, although it takes one well versed in the traditions of St. Elizabeth's to grasp it. In the floor just inside the main doors is set the college seal, depicting a pelican tearing her breast and feeding her young in the manner

that has made the pelican a religious symbol of charity, of mother love and of self-sacrifice.

"Look in the nest at the young," the well-informed will say. "The one with her beak stretched highest is for Mother Xavier; the others are the novices who came here with her when she founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Elizabeth in 1859."

"Young in years but mature in prudence and solid piety," Mother Xavier was summoned to Newark in 1859 and soon after founded the Sisters of Charity of St. Elizabeth. The following year Seton Hall College moved to South Orange from the old home near Madison where Madam Chegaray once had conducted her boarding school for select girls. Mother Xavier took a \$25,000 mortgage on the property and

moved in. She founded the Academy of St. Elizabeth and took in six pupils.

THE vigorous Mother Xavier pushed expansion. By 1880 she added another 225 acres to the original 51 surrounding the academy. She bought land to control water rights, to give her Sisters frontage on the Lackawanna Railroad, to give her community farm-lands for food. She and her Sisters landscaped the ground, built roads and rolled boulders to fill in low spots.

With land fronting on the railroad, Mother Xavier petitioned the Lackawanna to stop at the grounds. The railroad agreed—if the Sisters would build a road from the hilltop to the station, would build a station and would pay the station master's salary!

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WHITE TOWERS OF CONVENT

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In turn, the railroad magnanimously named the stop "Convent Station," and so it has been ever since.

Never one to stop at half measures, Mother Xavier planned the great center building of the "white towers." Outsiders gasped at the size of the structure—476 feet long, 150 feet deep, six stories high, "for vastness probably unmatched in the United States!" As for the Sisters, when the building was finished in 1880, "the building seemed so immense that they

academy, two from other schools. Of these only the Misses Maskell, McCabe, Ennis and Kenna survived to earn New Jersey's first women's degrees.

Mother Xavier saw something far beyond four graduates. In 1899 the Sisters of Charity built Xavier Hall, the east wing of the "white towers." Mother Xavier started Santa Rita Hall, with dormitory space for 105 students, in 1907—when seven "St. E." girls took their degrees. She built stately Holy Family Chapel, to the west of the administration building, in 1909, and in 1913 finished Santa Maria Hall. Bear in mind that none of the great gifts of money then pouring into many colleges came to build these additions; the Sisters of Charity raised them by taking mortgages themselves.

Mother Xavier built for something larger than she ever saw in use before her death in June 1915 at the age of 90. The old saw that "an institution is but the lengthened shadow of a man" more than met its fulfillment in Mother Xavier. As one of her Sisters, said: "She had a sublime trust in Divine Providence, but never shirked any of her responsibilities" or, said another way, God helps those who help themselves).

By 1915 the college had well-established courses in horticulture, science, music and teaching; a course for secretaries, and the traditional classical courses in liberal arts. Two years later, when the Association of American Universities published its fifth annual list of accredited universities and colleges, the roster included St. Elizabeth's.

THE college moved quietly through the years. Between the time of Mother Xavier's death and the construction of St. Joseph Hall only one major building was built. That was O'Connor Hall, started in 1924 after a four-year drive by an alumnae netted \$145,000. Appropriately enough, the college named the 240-room dormitory for the bishop whose words buoyed the spirits of the Class of 1903.

While it gathered relatively few material possessions between 1915 and 1954, St. Elizabeth's gained academic distinction. Its degree winners readily found acceptance as graduate students in leading universities. Its graduates were prepared for many professions, including teaching. Acquisition of the Nevin House on Madison Ave. adjoining the campus permitted expansion of home economic studies.

Comfortably settled with a student body of about 400 before World War II, the College of St. Elizabeth squarely met postwar demands. In September 1947 enrollment soared close to 650—and made the college administration acutely aware of cramped space.

Alumnae and friends anticipated the college's 50th anniversary in 1949 by seeking funds for an activities building, a science hall, another dormitory and a library. The activities building—St. Joseph Hall—has been built (with the Sisters holding a \$700-

were frightened at their own temerity at incurring its expense." Five years later the Sisters added a new wing.

Mother Xavier and the Sisters, aware of the needs of women's education, looked forward to a full four-year college as the 1890s wore on. They added a postgraduate course of two years' study and gradually upgraded the quality and scope of the training of the faculty.

To that end Sisters left Convent and went off to the campuses of Yale and Harvard and Columbia and Chicago and New York University. Consider the problems and difficulties facing nuns on secular campuses in those days as they sought higher degrees and broader training; but when the state granted a charter for the College of St. Elizabeth for "the education, instruction and culture of females," Mother Xavier and her Sisters were completely prepared.

COLLEGE opened formally in September 1899, with Sister Mary Pauline Kelliger as first president. The faculty outnumbered the six students, four of whom had come from the



Greek class finds inspiration for language studies in authentic amphitheatre built in 1932 while others woo muse in Shakespeare garden with flowers grouped according to line from The Bard's plays. —



000 mortgage). The other buildings are still acutely needed.

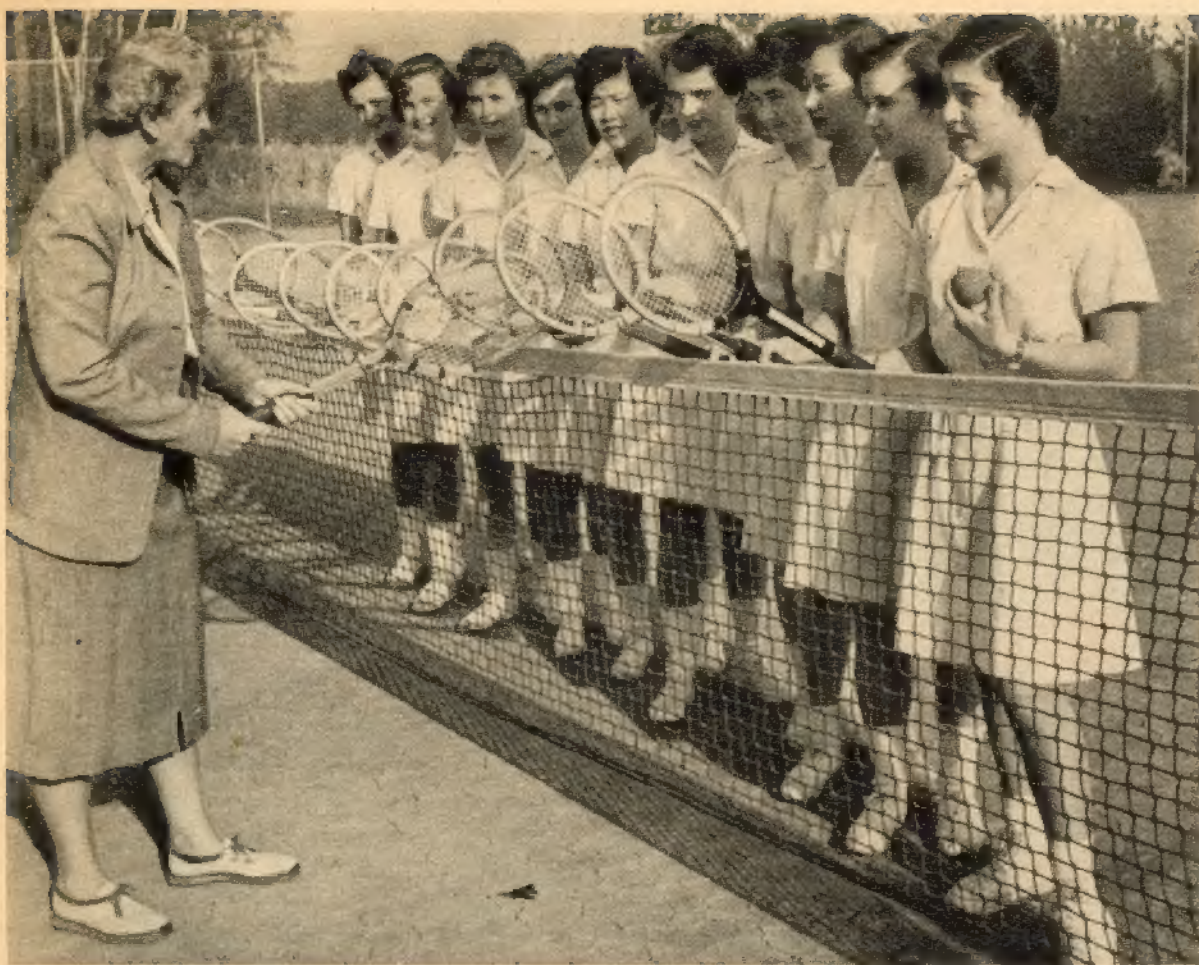
REGARDLESS of campus needs, however, the quality of a St. E's education remains unimpaired. This year enrollment leveled off at about 475 students preparing for either a B.A. degree (in one of the liberal arts curricula, in teaching or premedical courses) or a B.S. degree (in science, home economics and business administration). Last year 40 per cent of the graduates became teachers.

With dormitory space limited to 345 students, the commuting student (the "day hop") is important on campus. The "day hop" may drive to college, but more likely she is aboard the Lackawanna train arriving in Convent at 8:08 a.m. Much of the morning St.

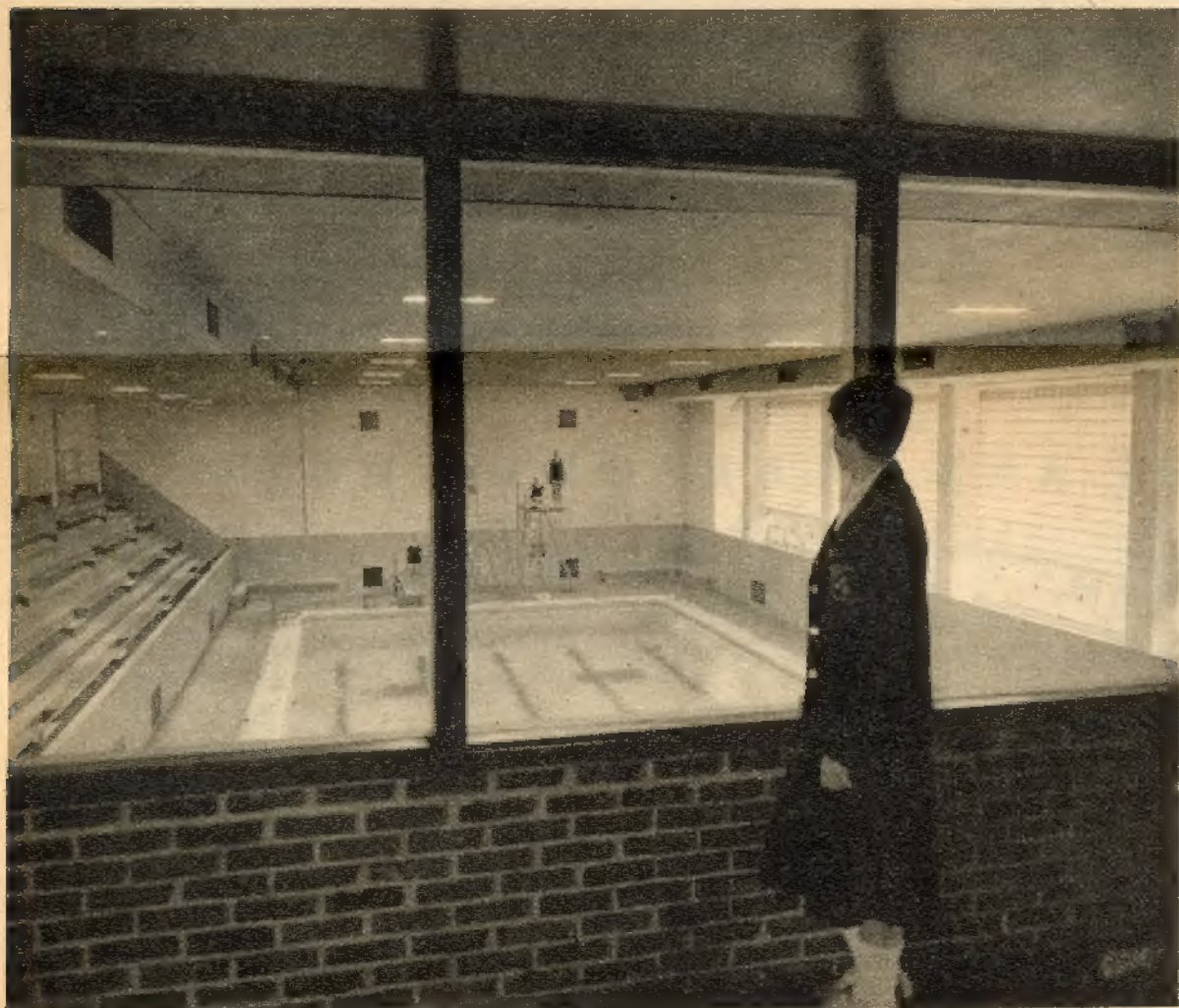
Elizabeth schedule long has been attuned to that train.

Classes start at 8:30 a.m., for example. That gives commuters time to ramble up the sloping walk from the station to the "Admin" (administration building). It allows a few minutes to gather in the Admin near the statue of St. Anthony (the accepted campus meeting place) and time to cut out the back doors, past the tennis courts and up the rise to "St. Joe's" or Santa Maria for classes. Twenty-two minutes, experience proves, is enough time from Lackawanna to class—but not too much.

There is a discernible seriousness about St. Elizabeth's. College administrators state their purpose: "... to send into the world competent graduates deeply imbued with the spirit



Net squad reports for practice in modest program of intercollegiate athletes and water sports from diving to rhythmic swimming are held in pastel-tinted pool (below) illuminated by colored lights.



of dynamic Christian wisdom . . . to create in all its students an awareness of woman's distinctive role, her dignity, her moral influence over world attitudes, and her special duty to cherish and transmit her Christian culture and way of life."

YET the dedicated purpose and unyielding high academic standards allow full time for the absorption of St. Elizabeth traditions (although the undergraduates insist that "St. E's" never could be spelled "St. Ease").

A St. Elizabeth's tradition is the Greek play, staged every fourth year in the authentic Greek amphitheater constructed in 1932. It takes four years to get ready for a performance—one year to get over last year's play

and three more years to get ready for 1959.

Campus pride also rests in the unusual Shakespeare garden in the vale between St. Joseph Hall and the "white towers." Sister Helen Angela laid that out in the early 1920s, grouping flowers according to lines from The Bard's plays (e.g., roses, for the line from Romeo and Juliet: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet").

Seriousness of purpose is laid aside on occasion for student-motivated affairs. St. Elizabeth's girls enjoy a modest program of intercollegiate athletics, sessions of rhythmic swimming in their handsome pool, walks on their beautiful rolling campus. They earnestly plan their Class Days (featured

by more-or-less original plays—such as "The Real Mikoydo" or "The Wizard of Ours"). They can look forward to Frosh Hop in September, the sophomore tea dance at a New York hotel in February, the junior fall weekend featured by a Saturday night formal in the Hollywood-like new lounge, and, finally, to "Grad" dance at a New York hotel during graduation week.

This gathering of memories is viewed by the college administration as part of the education of a St. Elizabeth's girl. Such extracurricular affairs have existed from the start from the days when the Class of 1903 thought luncheon at Day's in Morristown was a real ball, from the days of the Snow Ball Cotillion in 1905, the Bryant-Taft field hockey game in 1908 (before women could vote their presidential preference), the staging of Sheridan's "Critic" by the drama club in 1909 and the first issue of the college yearbook in 1910.

THROUGH the 56 years since the College of St. Elizabeth first occupied a small corner of the "white towers" there has been a continuity of purpose and a continuity of tradition. Only three Sisters have been president of St. Elizabeth's—Sister Mary Pauline, the first president; Sister Marie Jose, whose career as dean and president spanned the years from 1921 until 1951, and the current president, Sister Hildegard Marie.

Sister Hildegard Marie faces the task of guiding the College of St. Elizabeth into the oncoming days when student applications are certain to increase greatly. She sees a student body expanded about a third by 1970—up to 800 or 625. Yet, she calmly accepts responsibility: "If in the future we have to make Catholic higher education available to more young women, we will do so."

St. Elizabeth's particularly needs two buildings soon—a new dormitory

and a new science building. Sister Hildegard Marie says that three years ago she believed the trend would be in the direction of increasing commuter student enrollment. However, residents outnumber commuters about two to one, and requests for rooms on campus are stronger than ever. So many sophomores and freshmen are living on campus now that residency of new students will be limited next September.

GROWING demands for instruction in the sciences, particularly the biological sciences, also face the college administration. Two "temporary" wooden science laboratory buildings are still much in use, and expansion of laboratory facilities three years ago has only kept pace with the needs. "We are right up to capacity again," says Sister Hildegard Marie.

The president is rightfully proud of the training in the sciences offered at St. Elizabeth's. "We've always been noted for the quality of our teaching in the sciences," she says. Nevertheless, she emphasizes, "don't minimize our teaching of the humanities; they are still most important to us."

There is a marked serenity at the College of St. Elizabeth. As far as new buildings are concerned, a visitor senses they'll be forthcoming—after all, these are the same Sisters of Charity who in 1880 calmly mortgaged themselves out of sight to build the massive central portion of the "white towers."

As far as modern trends in education are concerned, it is easy to conclude that the Sisters of Charity have every intention of keeping pace—or staying ahead. Could less be expected from first woman's college in New Jersey? This, after all, is the college Mother Xavier founded—when most educators (male educators, that is) agreed the best diploma for a woman was a marriage license.



End of school day finds "hops" awaiting train at Convent Station.